

*Reprinted from the BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL,
December 24th, 1932*

Obituary

E. TREACHER COLLINS, F.R.C.S.

Consulting Surgeon, Royal London Ophthalmic Hospital

The death of Mr. Treacher Collins, which took place on December 14th, has deprived the world of English ophthalmology of one of its principal leaders. Very early in his career he attained an established position, and in recent years he came to be regarded as the doyen of British ophthalmologists. Throughout his life a careful and skilful observer, he did much to establish the very high reputation of British ophthalmology in the scientific world.

Edward Treacher Collins was the son of Dr. W. J. Collins, and on his mother's side came of an old Huguenot stock. His elder brother, Sir William J. Collins, well known as an ophthalmic surgeon, and a former chairman of the London County Council and for some years a Liberal M.P., has served the country well in many public offices. Treacher Collins was educated at University College School, which in those days still occupied premises behind the present University College. He and Ernest Clarke, whose death was recorded only a few weeks ago, were at school together, though Clarke was by some years his senior. His medical education was gained at Middlesex Hospital, from which he qualified in 1883. He very soon turned his attention to ophthalmology, and from 1884 to 1887 he was house-surgeon at Moorfields. It was the work done in the following seven years, as curator and pathologist to the Royal London Ophthalmic Hospital, which laid the foundations of his extensive and accurate knowledge of ophthalmology and established his reputation as a scientific worker. His first paper in the Moorfields Hospital *Reports* appeared in 1887 on an-ophthalmos, and his contributions to the Ophthalmological Society's *Transactions* began in a modest way in 1888. (He had been elected a member in 1885.) He became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons in 1890.

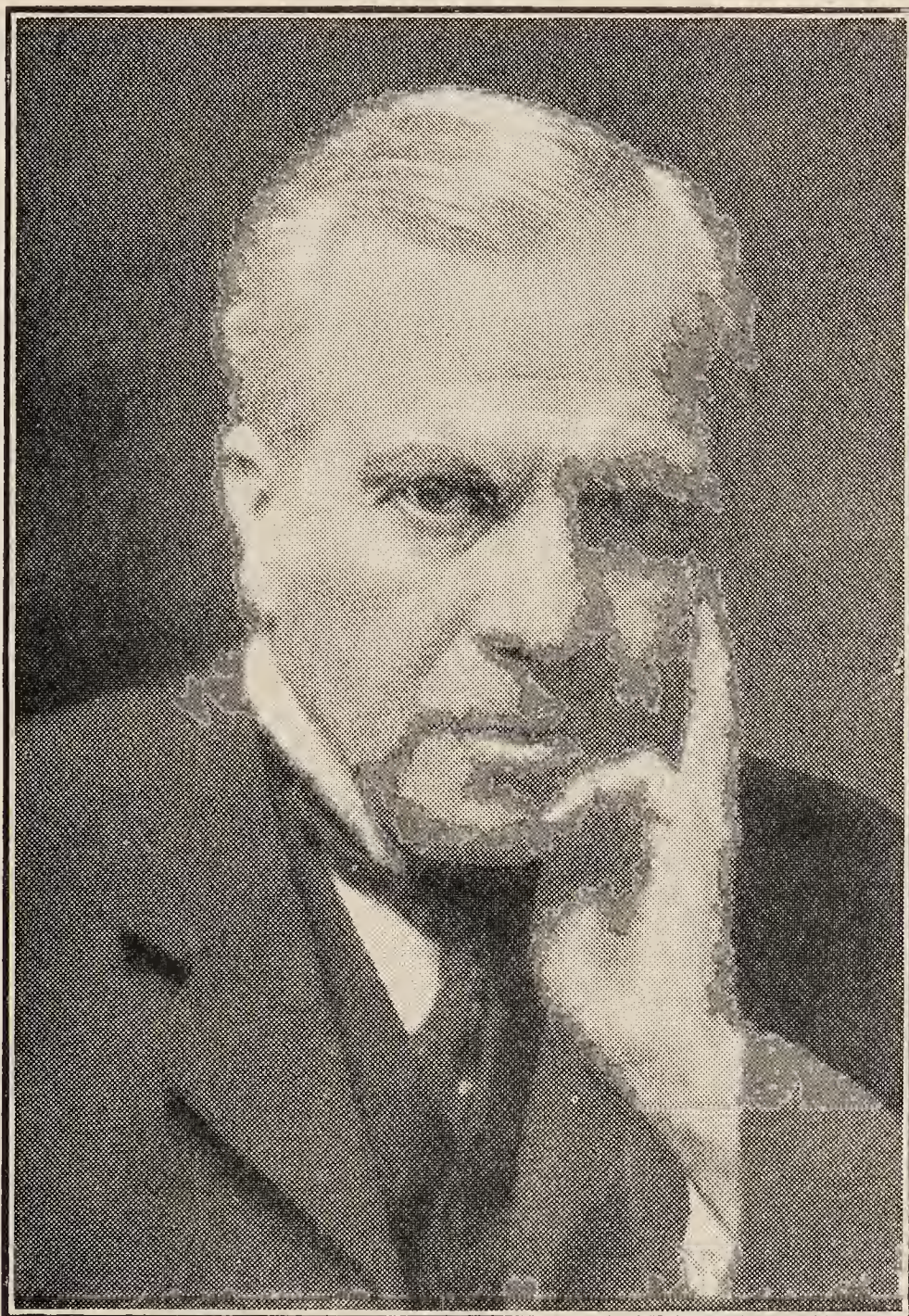
The results of his ten years' apprenticeship at Moorfields were summarized in the Hunterian Lectures which he gave

to the Royal College of Surgeons in 1894, and in these lectures will be found the germ of much work which he subsequently elaborated. The lectures, revised and enlarged, were published in book form in 1896 under the title of *Researches into the Anatomy and Pathology of the Eye*. It was this work which gained for him the Middlemore Prize of the British Medical Association. But probably what Collins valued more than anything else was that it was his period of office as curator that established the repute of Moorfields as a leading school of research and education in the eye world, and many ophthalmologists of note in Great Britain, America, and elsewhere look back with affectionate regard to the work they did under Collins's guidance in the Moorfields laboratory.

In 1894 Mr. George Lawson, surgeon oculist to Queen Victoria, was asked to nominate an ophthalmic surgeon to go to Persia to operate on the Shah's eldest son, and Collins was selected. He married before his departure, and spent his honeymoon in Persia. On his return he wrote an account of his experiences there under the title *In the Kingdom of the Shah*. He was rewarded for his services with the Order of the Lion and the Sun. Among other results of his experiences was a keen interest in and an extensive knowledge of Persian art, especially carpets and faience. On his return in 1895 he was elected to the staff of the Royal London Ophthalmic Hospital as assistant surgeon. From the time of his appointment as house-surgeon till his death, when he was consulting surgeon and a member of the committee of management of the hospital, a period of forty-eight years elapsed. During the five years following his return from Persia, despite the increasing claims of clinical work on his time, he continued his anatomical and pathological researches, and again the work of these five years was partially summarized in the Erasmus Wilson Lectures delivered at the Royal College of Surgeons in February, 1900, on the anatomy and pathology of the eye. About this time the question of the removal of the Royal London Ophthalmic Hospital from its old site in Moorfields to City Road was under consideration, and Collins, as secretary of the medical board, was much occupied with the consequent arrangements.

A short list of his hospital appointments will serve to show the amount of purely clinical work that he did. In addition to his Moorfields surgeoncy, he was ophthalmic surgeon to Charing Cross Hospital and to the Belgrave Hospital for Children, visiting

ophthalmic surgeon to the Metropolitan Asylums Board Ophthalmia Schools at Swanley, consulting surgeon to the Westminster Ophthalmic Hospital, and to the Oxford Eye Hospital. He was also lecturer on ophthalmology to Charing Cross Hospital, to the London School of Tropical Medicine, and to the Oxford University Post-Graduate School of Ophthalmology. He was secretary of the



Ophthalmological Society from 1898 to 1901, having previously served on the council, and became a vice-president for the first time in 1905. In 1915 he was awarded the Nettleship Medal (given for the most distinguished scientific work in ophthalmology done in the preceding three years), and in 1917 he was elected to the presidency. During his presidency the formation of the Council of British Ophthalmologists was first mooted, and

he took a leading part in the founding of this body, which has played such an important part in what may be called the State and public relations of ophthalmic science. He became president in succession to Mr. J. B. Lawford. In 1921 he was asked to give the Bowman Lecture, the highest honour that can be conferred by British oculists, and, characteristically, he chose a purely scientific subject for his lecture—"Changes in the visual organs correlated with the adoption of arboreal life and the assumption of the erect posture." The lecture illustrates fully the breadth of his scientific knowledge and the amount of painstaking research which he put into all his work.

Collins was the official representative for the British Government at the American Ophthalmological Congress in 1922. Shortly after his return from America, negotiations for the resumption of the international congresses such as had been held at four-year intervals before the war were begun. It was soon found that the difficulties in the way of the resumption of the normal congresses were too great, and, in place of an international congress, a Convention of English-speaking Ophthalmologists was held in London in 1925. For that occasion Collins, for the second time, became president of the Ophthalmological Society, and much of the success of the convention was due to the gracious way in which he conducted the business of the meeting. Few who were present at the banquet in the Guildhall, when the Duke of Connaught was the guest of honour, will forget the charm and grace of the chairman's speech. It was during that meeting that Collins was asked to select a small committee of five to try to arrange for a true international congress. Only the few who formed that committee can know the amount of work that he did to ensure its success. As a result of its work, and of the most valuable co-operation of Professor van der Hoeve, a meeting was held at Scheveningen in 1927, attended by fifty delegates representing twenty-five different nationalities, and, though Collins's small committee looked forward with some trepidation to the meeting, nothing could have gone more smoothly. At the conclusion of the meeting at Scheveningen, when the International Council of Ophthalmologists was formed, Collins was elected by universal acclamation honorary president of the council, and so took his place beside Bowman, von Graefe, Donders, and Fuchs as a leader in international ophthalmology. In 1931 he was awarded the Mackenzie Medal, and took as the subject of his address "The physiology of weeping"; it

was published in the *British Journal of Ophthalmology* this year. He was an honorary member of the American Medical Association, of the Copenhagen Medical Society, the Egyptian Ophthalmological Society, and the Hungarian Ophthalmological Society.

It is impossible to enumerate here the contributions of Treacher Collins to the literature of ophthalmology. There are over one hundred original papers of varying size in the *Transactions* of the Ophthalmological Society alone, apart from innumerable contributions to discussions—and very frequently Collins's remarks in a discussion were of much greater value than the paper that gave rise to them. In the *Moorfields Reports* there are over twenty papers of value. Others appeared in the *Transactions* of the Section of Ophthalmology of the Royal Society of Medicine, in the *British Medical Journal*, and in the *Lancet*. Along with Mayou he published the well-known book *The Pathology of the Eye*, which has recently gone into a second edition, and in 1929 he published *The History and Traditions of the Moorfields Eye Hospital*. Even after the illness which was to prove fatal attacked him he was still able to show his keenness for anything which would advance the interests of the subject of his life's work, and he drew up and sent to the present writer notes and a draft of regulations for the formation of an International Federation of Ophthalmological Societies, which will come up for discussion at the forthcoming International Congress at Madrid. And, even when he was obviously failing, he insisted on having the papers and letters brought out and read to him.

Whatever he undertook, whether it was of scientific interest or to further the more general interests of ophthalmology, he did it with his whole heart. His two greatest interests were the Royal London Ophthalmic Hospital and the Ophthalmological Society. For these he worked all his life, and of these he thought as he lay dying. How dear the interests of the Ophthalmological Society were to him was shown by a letter to a junior after the latter had completed a term of office in the society. It was a very gracious thing for an old and honoured president to take the trouble to write and thank a younger officer for the work he had done in the interests of the society, and it threw a strong light on his affection for the society and his keen interest in its prosperity. He was absolutely zealous in his pursuit of any scheme which would help to advance the science and art of ophthalmology. He was without any envious thought, always willing to do anything to help a colleague. His heart harboured

no mean thought. It is little wonder that there was awakened a strong feeling of affectionate admiration on the part of all those who were in any way brought into intimate association with him. Though he had no gift of languages he was immensely popular with all his foreign colleagues, and when he rose to speak at a great international meeting at Scheveningen he was received with prolonged acclamation. He had a very pretty wit in after-dinner speaking. There was a graciousness and a quiet humour about the short speeches which he was so frequently called on to make at ophthalmic gatherings. He always seemed to be able to strike the right note, and if a story was introduced it always seemed fitting to the occasion. His death leaves a gap among the workers in the science of ophthalmology which only very few can fill, and a wound in the hearts of many of us who were his friends of which the scar will always remain.

Sir JOHN H. PARSONS, F.R.S., writes :

British ophthalmology has reason to be proud of the names of its votaries who have attained world-wide recognition as pioneers in the science and art of this branch of medicine. The name of Treacher Collins will be unanimously added, by those competent to judge, to the list, which includes such masters as William Mackenzie, Bowman, Nettleship, Critchett, Priestley Smith (still happily with us), and others. Born of a non-conforming stock, he was innately imbued with an acutely critical outlook and indomitable perseverance. At an early stage in his professional career he became associated with Moorfields Eye Hospital, at that time the Mecca of ophthalmologists from all parts of the world, and to that fact must be ascribed his lifelong enthusiasm for ophthalmology and his never-failing love of his Alma Mater. Various as were his tastes and interests—and they were many—they were but the recreations which enabled him to return with renewed vigour to his all-absorbing tasks. In those early days Moorfields was unique, at any rate in English-speaking countries, in emphasizing the importance of pathology as the basis of a scientific knowledge of diseases of the eye, and Collins's appointment to the post of curator of the museum and pathologist to the hospital was the determining factor in his devotion to pathological research, which persisted throughout his life. Research workers may be broadly divided into two classes : —those who work solely for the love of discovery, and those who work always with one eye fixed upon the application of new truths to utilitarian ends. Such a contrast

is pre-eminently to be seen in Thomas Young and Donders. Treacher Collins belonged to the latter class. Many of his early researches were devoted to a minute investigation of the anatomy of those parts of the eye specially concerned in intraocular operations. Others dealt with the anatomical concomitants of various types of secondary glaucoma and their influence upon successful operative treatment. The wealth of pathological material at Moorfields, however, early interested him in more recondite subjects, as, for example, congenital malformations.

Collins was endowed with an exceedingly methodical mind. As each new problem was successively attacked it underwent a long period of gestation. Every available particle of evidence was sought out and brought into correlation with his own original observations. Plausible theories were carefully examined, and the pros and cons submitted to the touchstone of a scientific agnosticism which is only too rare in these days of relativity and indetermination. Ultimately what appeared to Collins to be the most plausible theory was definitely and finally adopted. Usually, but not always, most of his fellow workers agreed with his conclusions. Occasionally fresh evidence arose which seemed to some to refute the favoured hypothesis. But Collins was a valiant fighter, and, when he had once made up his mind, was difficult to move. No one could possibly doubt his enthusiasm and absolute honesty, but when he had solved a problem to his own satisfaction he almost seemed to resent reopening the question. This attitude of mind resulted in clearly crystallized views upon innumerable ophthalmic problems, and, as he was generally right, made him an excellent teacher. Probably no one of recent years has had a more widespread influence on the teaching of the fundamental pathological data of ophthalmology than Treacher Collins, and, from the purely scientific point of view, it is as a pathologist that he will live in the history of British ophthalmology.

Everything, however, which conduced to the recognition and advancement of his subject appealed to him, and stirred him into strenuous and dogged activity. After Moorfields Hospital, the Ophthalmological Society of the United Kingdom claimed most of his affection. He struggled hard and effectually for the retention of its identity when it was threatened with incorporation in the Royal Society of Medicine. But his ophthalmic interests were world-wide, and he was as much *persona grata* in the United States and foreign countries as among his own

countrymen. When, after the war, it was impossible to gather the nations together, he insisted upon the next best thing, and was the prime moving spirit of the English-speaking Conference. When better days came he was with one accord selected as the president of the International Congress at Amsterdam. He was equally active in those ethical and semi-political aspects of ophthalmology which are not catered for by the scientific societies, and when the suggestion of the Council of British Ophthalmologists for dealing with these problems was put before him he heartily supported it and became the first president.

As a man he was the soul of honesty and the enemy of humbug, a steadfast friend and no time-server. With a somewhat "dour" exterior, he had a fine sense of humour, and made an ideal travelling companion.

Mr. THEODORE W. LULING, chairman of Moorfields, sends the following tribute:

The passing of E. Treacher Collins marks the close of a life dedicated to the service of Moorfields Eye Hospital. Appointed house-surgeon in 1884, within three years he occupied the important post of pathologist. It was at this time that he established his reputation as a great teacher of ophthalmology, and laid the foundation of an international reputation. His succession to the honorary staff followed as a matter of course. An indefatigable worker and teacher, he held the tradition of Moorfields as a heritage to be passed on to all those with whom he came into contact. His great achievements in the field of ophthalmology are without the scope of this writing. Collins retired as a surgeon of Moorfields at the age of 60 in 1922, and thereafter devoted his time to the affairs of the hospital as a member of the committee of management and of numerous subcommittees. His dominating personality played an important part in the rapid development and expansion of the hospital from that time on. His last literary work was entitled *The History and Traditions of the Moorfields Eye Hospital*. Collins once said that he had acquired the "Moorfields habit" at an early age, and had never been able to break himself of it. Treacher Collins had many followers, but few peers.

[The photograph reproduced is by Lizzie Caswall Smith, London.]